

WHITHER IRANIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS?

Nader Entessar
Spring Hill College

Introduction

The contours of Iranian-Turkish relations are multidimensional and complex and have been shaped by the contrasting and contradictory visions of the Iranian leadership's Islamic world view and the Turkish elite's absolute secularism, the Iran-Iraq conflict, the Persian Gulf War of 1991 and its aftermath, political developments in Central Asia and the Caucasus where Tehran and Ankara have at times competed for influence, and the emerging Israel-Turkish military and political axis.

Although the Turks and the Persians have historically had numerous disagreements and conflicts, for the most part their relationship remained remarkably cordial until the advent of the Islamic Republic in Iran. In recent decades, a number of factors helped bring about the coincidence of interests between Iran and Turkey. Anti-communism was quite pronounced in the foreign policy posture of both countries as each perceived the Soviet Union's regional ambitions as a major threat to its territorial integrity and national security. The political and military ties Iran and Turkey developed with the West as a hedge against the Soviet Union also brought about a coincidence of interests between Tehran and Ankara and created the framework for the coordination of their regional activities with respect to Kurdish uprisings and other commonly perceived threats in the region. Furthermore, bilateral relations between Tehran and Ankara were strengthened as Iran and Turkey saw themselves as a counterbalance to rising Arab nationalism and radicalism.

The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 brought about profound changes in Iran's foreign policy orientation affecting the country's relations with the West as well as its neighbors. The Iran-Iraq War further heightened Turkey's apprehension about the spill-over effects of this war and the possible use of the so-called Kurdish card by either Iran or Iraq and the implications of such a move for Turkey's own Kurdish assertiveness. Once Iraq invaded Iran and started its war against Iran, Saddam Hussein's regime took the initiative in playing its Kurdish card as a strategic tool against a militarily disorganized Iran. Ironically, this was akin to the strategy the Shah had adopted a decade earlier in undermining the Iraqi regime.¹ Infighting among various Kurdish groups made it easier for Saddam Hussein to use his Kurdish card. For example, at that time, like today, the

two main Iraqi Kurdish parties, Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud and the late Idris Barzani, were locked in a fierce political battle to control Iraqi Kurdistan. The absence of unity among the major Kurdish groups made it easier for Saddam Hussein to play one group against the other, and to encourage the Kurds to support the war effort against Iran by giving them a modicum of responsibility to operate along the border regions of Kurdistan. At the same time, the Iraqi government came under heavy pressure from Ankara to control

Kurdish activities along the border regions with Turkey. Ankara had claimed that the border regions under the control of the KDP were porous and hence a danger to its security. Turkey had further charged that the KDP had allowed Turkey's principal antigovernment Kurdish guerrilla group—the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK)—to use Iraqi territory to launch military operations inside Turkey.

Both Ankara and Baghdad were also concerned about possible Kurdish attacks against a strategic pipeline that connected the Kirkuk oil fields to Iskenderun in Turkey. This pipeline, which transported one million barrels of oil per day, provided one-third of Turkey's petroleum needs and provided Ankara with over \$300 million in rental fees. Because of the strategic importance of the Kirkuk-Iskenderun oil pipeline, neither Ankara nor Baghdad could afford damage to this pipeline. Therefore, they signed two agreements in 1981 and 1984 to allow Turkish troops to enter Iraqi territory in pursuit of Kurdish guerrillas. Ankara was fearful that an Iranian victory in the Iran-Iraq War would inevitably lead to the disintegration of Iraq and the establishment of a Kurdish state or autonomous region with unpredictable consequences for the Kurdish regions of Turkey. Therefore, Ankara concluded that an outright Iranian military victory over Iraq must be prevented and any possible alliance between the Iraqi Kurds and Iran against Saddam Hussein's regime must be prevented. In effect, Turkey became a reluctant, albeit a secondary, participant in the Iran-Iraq War.

In order to deter further Turkish involvement in the conflict, the Iranian government issued a number of threats against the Kirkuk-Iskenderun pipeline, correctly claiming that that it was a legitimate target in wartime. The Iraqi forces had already targeted and destroyed several major Iranian oil installations, including the giant refinery in Abadan. Turkey, however, insisted that it would view any Iranian or Iranian-supported Kurdish attack on this pipeline as an attack on Turkish interests and would view it as a hostile act against Turkey itself. Ankara also threatened to cut its lucrative trade ties with Tehran if Iran did not desist from aiding anti-Iraq Kurdish groups. The right-wing Turkish press even speculated that Iran's ultimate objective in aiding the Kurds was to seize the Kirkuk oil fields.² Other Turkish sources postulated that the United States was encouraging Turkey to capture Kirkuk and its oil fields before Iraq fractured and to deny Iran a military victory in its war with Iraq.³

By late 1986, the Turkish military had increased its incursions inside Iraq and the Turkish air force had stepped up its bombing of several Kurdish villages in northern Iraq. The Iranian government was particularly upset about the timing of Turkish attacks against the Iraqi Kurds because Tehran was preparing to launch a major offensive against Iraqi targets at the same time. In December 1986, in order to reduce tensions with Turkey and alleviate Ankara's fears of alleged Iranian territorial ambitions in Iraq, the Islamic Republic organized a meeting of anti-Saddam Hussein groups in Tehran to stress Iran's commitment to the territorial integrity of Iraq. However, then President Ali Khamenei stated that Iran would not hesitate to challenge another country's intervention in Iraq's internal affairs. Prime Minister Mussavi echoed the same sentiment when he warned other countries not to revive old territorial claims against Iraq.⁴ Although neither Khamenei nor Mussavi mentioned Turkey by name, it was clear that they were addressing their comments to Turkish officials. The crisis between Iran and Turkey came to a head in August 1987 when Turkish border officials arrested ninety-five members of an elite unit of the Iranian *pasdaran* and charged them with attempted sabotage of the

Kirkuk-Iskenderun pipeline. Although the Turkish government did not provide any evidence of its charges and the crisis was eventually defused through diplomatic negotiations, this episode clearly demonstrated the potential for serious Iranian-Turkish confrontation during the course of the Iran-Iraq War.

After the end of the Iran-Iraq War, the Iraqi regime accelerated its attacks on Kurdish villages. These attacks included the use of chemical weapons. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss Iraqi use of chemical weapons against its Kurdish population or the wholesale destruction of Kurdish villages by the Ba'athi regime in Iraq. For our purpose, it is important to note the reactions of Turkey and Iran to Iraqi policies in this regard within the context of a changing Tehran-Ankara relationship. As Kurdish refugees began to enter Turkey to avoid certain death or persecution in Iraq, the Turkish government initially supported Baghdad's claim that chemical weapons had not been used against the Kurds. In the immediate aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, Turkey was mostly concerned about repatriating Kurdish refugees to Iraq and did not want to encourage Iraqi Kurds to seek sanctuary inside Turkey. Nor did Ankara want to give Saddam Hussein an excuse to renege on his \$2 billion debts to Turkey or to jeopardize its lucrative trade with Iraq.

Iran, on the other hand, was anxious to put international pressure on Iraq to withdraw from Iranian territory and implement the provisions of the United Nations Security Council resolutions pertaining to the Iran-Iraq War. In this vein, the Islamic Republic gave full publicity to Iraq's use of poison gas against the Kurds. In September 1998, Tehran invited representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit Kurdish refugee camps in the Iranian province of West Azerbaijan and obtain eyewitness reports of Baghdad's use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians. At the same time, a two-person UNHCR team toured Kurdish refugee camps in southeastern Turkey to collect data on the reported use of Iraqi chemical weapons against the Kurds. In both cases, the visiting teams concluded that they saw no evidence to substantiate the refugees'

claim in this regard. On the other hand, independent international human rights bodies lent credence to the Kurdish claims. For example, in an appeal to the United Nations, Amnesty International condemned Baghdad's reliance on chemical weapons as part of a systematic and deliberate policy by the Iraqi government to eliminate large number of Kurds.⁵ It was not, however, until after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait that Western governments and international governmental organizations joined in a chorus of condemnation of Iraq for its use of chemical weapons against the Kurds.

The Second Persian Gulf War, Iran and Turkey

The calculus of regional equations and power constellation changed dramatically in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The eventual massive deployment of American air, naval, and ground troops as part of a multinational force to fight Iraq in Operation Desert Storm placed Iran and Turkey in a quandary. Given Turkey's lucrative economic ties with Iraq and the *modus vivendi* Ankara had reached with Baghdad regarding containment of the Kurdish movement, Turkey could have been deterred from drastically changing its policies towards Iraq. On the other hand, as a neighbor of Iraq and an ambitious regional power, Turkey could not have been expected

to soft-pedal Iraq's annexation of Kuwait and acquiesce to a major shift in the geopolitics of the region. Ankara's initial response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was a traditional Kemalist reaction, forcing it to move cautiously with a reluctance to become embroiled in a dispute between Arab countries.⁶ In this vein, a plethora of Turkish officials issued mild statements deploring Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and expressing the hope that Baghdad would soon withdraw from Kuwait.

With the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 661 on August 6, 1990, calling for all countries to boycott all products originating from Iraq, pressure mounted on Ankara to shut down its two oil pipelines to Iraq and join the economic embargo against Baghdad. As events unfolded at a fast pace and over 500,000 American military personnel assembled in the region in preparation for an eventual war against Iraq, the traditional Kemalist response to the Persian Gulf crisis was no longer a viable option for Turkey. By agreeing to halt all economic ties with Iraq, Turkey momentarily removed itself from the center of the impending storm. Between August and December 1990, a number of Turkish officials and prominent private citizens visited Baghdad to try to smooth Turkish-Iraqi relations in the aftermath of Ankara's economic sanctions against its erstwhile major trading partner. Among the more prominent Turkish individuals who visited Baghdad and held talks with Saddam Hussein or other high-level Iraqi officials were the veteran politician Bulent Ecevit (current Turkish Prime Minister), Erdal Inonu (leader of the Social Democratic Populist Party), and Necmettin Erbakan of the now defunct Islamic-oriented Welfare Party. These visits proved futile and paved the way for the Turkish government to strengthen its commitment to the goals of the U.S.-led anti-Iraq coalition forces. In a controversial move, the late Turkish President Turgut Ozal also granted permission to the United States to use the Incirlik air base in southeastern Turkey to launch attacks against Iraqi targets whenever it decided to do so. When the war against Iraq started in January 1991, Turkey was already a major participant in the conflict.

Iran's initial reaction to Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait was somewhat ambivalent. Unlike Turkey, Iran had no qualms about condemning in strongest terms Iraq's annexation of Kuwait. In fact, the Islamic Republic felt that its policies during the Iran-Iraq War and its uncompromising stance towards Saddam Hussein had now been vindicated. On the other hand, Tehran did not welcome the stationing of a large contingent of American troops so close to its own borders and security zones. Despite Iran's concerns about its national security, the so-called "pragmatists" in the ruling hierarchy continued to pursue several avenues for the peaceful settlement of the crisis. For example, through contacts with Turkish officials, President Hashemi Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Velayati stayed abreast of the unfolding developments in the Persian Gulf crisis. Although the "pragmatists" continued to subscribe publicly to the official government policy of neutrality and portrayed the crisis as a conflict between two equally guilty aggressors, it was evident that they sought to take advantage of this window of opportunity to reestablish Iran's credentials as a responsible and key player in regional affairs.

Perhaps both Turkey and Iran were convinced that the Kuwaiti crisis would lead to war and another inevitable Kurdish refugee crisis. The devastating and swift Iraqi military defeat at the hands of the coalition forces was followed by U.S. appeals to the Iraqi population to revolt against Saddam Hussein's government. The CIA-run Voice of

Free Iraq radio, operating out of Jedda, Saudi Arabia, had been encouraging a Kurdish uprising for several weeks. On the political front, both the KDP and the PUK continued to negotiate with Saddam Hussein to achieve the elusive autonomy the Iraqi Kurds had been demanding for so many years. Ankara was somewhat supportive of these negotiations as it was not pleased with the flow of 400,000 Kurdish refugees into Turkey. Iran, for its part, was apprehensive about the Kurdish overtures to the Iraqi regime. The principal reason for Iran's objections to these overtures was that Tehran felt that the Kurds would be obligated to join the Iraqi army to fight the Shi'as in southern Iraq in exchange for concessions they would obtain from Saddam Hussein in Kurdistan. Tehran was also intent on exploiting the close collaboration between Baghdad and the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* to its advantage by enticing the Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas to attack the *Mojahedin* units inside Iraq. The Iranian cause was helped initially by purported eyewitness reports of the *Mojahedin's* participation on the side of the Iraqi forces against the Kurds. According to the British journalist and veteran Middle East analyst David Hirst, in one particular case the Kurdish forces trapped fifty-seven *Mojahedin* who were accused of aiding Iraqi soldiers inside a school and shot them to death.⁷

The Rise and Fall of Operation Poised Hammer: Implications for Turkish-Iranian Ties

The tragedy of Kurdish refugees fleeing Iraqi forces and the implications of the unmitigated refugee flow into Turkey prompted President Ozal to suggest the establishment of a "safe haven" inside Iraq to protect the Kurds from Iraqi reprisals and encourage Kurdish refugees to return home. With the encouragement of then British Prime Minister John Major, the United States took the lead in establishing such a zone north of the thirty-sixth parallel. The United States then warned Iraq not to fly fixed-wing airplanes or helicopters into this zone. Over 8,000 American, British and French troops occupied this zone to enforce the no-fly rules and aid in the resettlement of returning refugees. Several thousand additional Western troops were also stationed on Turkish soil to help maintain the integrity of the Kurdish "safe haven" and deter Iraqi military incursions north of the thirty-sixth parallel. This operation, which functioned under the name Operation Poised Hammer, was supported by several Turkish administrations, but it was quietly terminated in December 1996 amidst serious misgivings expressed by several Turkish parliamentarians about its long-term effect on Turkey's regional standing.

Iran, on the other hand, has consistently opposed Western operations inside Iraq and has questioned the legal validity of the *de facto* partition of Iraq by unilateral actions of the United States. Tehran is also fearful that the no-fly zone can be used by the United States to threaten Iran's territorial integrity in the future or simply become a safe enclave for a variety of anti-Islamic Republic groups. According to one report, the Iranian intelligence sources have obtained information about American and Israeli agents operating inside the Kurdish "safe haven" to destabilize Iran's northwestern border regions.⁸ The Islamic Republic has also accused the forces of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), who have bases inside the "safe haven" in northern Iraq, of serving as tools of the United States and Israel.

Ankara seems to have adopted a cautious attitude towards openly identifying with the KDPI while at the same time providing some support to them as a counterbalance to

the alleged Iranian assistance to the PKK. Moreover, the Kurdish administration of northern Iraq has made a number of overtures towards Turkey and Iran. This has ironically resulted in both closer cooperation between Ankara and Tehran as well as suspicions about the ultimate goals of each country in their dealings with the Kurdish autonomous region. Iran and Turkey have held regular meetings at the ministerial levels to discuss how they could coordinate their responses to developments in Iraqi Kurdistan. The two countries have also established a Joint Security Commission to deal with the Kurdish problem along their borders as well as the border regions of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Turkish-Iranian security gatherings have been held at the interior, defense and foreign ministry levels and have dealt with a broad range of issues. The most recent of such meetings took place in Ankara in August 1999 to address a host of bilateral issues, including Turkish concerns about alleged Iranian help for the PKK and Iran's objections to Turkey's military incursions inside Iran, ostensibly in hot pursuit of PKK guerrillas.⁹

Notwithstanding the coincidence of Iranian-Turkish interests in establishing security along their Kurdish-inhabited border regions, Tehran and Ankara have developed somewhat divergent policies in this regard. While Turkey has sought to co-opt major Iraqi Kurdish parties and bring them under its tutelage, Iran has remained suspicious of both Western and Turkish motives in the region. Iran has identified several developments that have compelled the Islamic Republic to view with some apprehension the increasingly dominant and militarily bold Turkish presence in Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁰ Tehran is fearful that Ankara will seek to either directly or indirectly control the oil fields of northern Iraq, thus altering the balance of power in the region. Although republican Turkey officially renounced its claim to the Ottoman territory of Mosul in northern Iraq in 1926, some ultranationalist elements in contemporary Turkey have revived the notion of Turkish control of the region. Today, Turkish claims to Mosul are not simply based on earlier Ottoman control of the area. Rather, the existence of some 500,000 Turkmen may give Ankara an incentive to seek control of the Kurdish oil region on the pretext of defending the rights of the Turkmen. Graham Fuller, a former CIA analyst and current RAND Corporation expert on Turkey, contends that the Iraqi Turkmen feel that they are "harshly oppressed by Baghdad and the Kurds, but consider themselves abandoned even by Turkey over the years."¹¹ The revival of Turkish claims to the oil rich parts of Iraqi Kurdistan received extensive coverage in the Iranian media, although some Iranian newspaper reports contended that Turkey would eventually be forced to abandon its grandiose designs on Iraqi Kurdistan because of negative consequences for the stability of Turkey's own Kurdish regions.¹²

Iran has also objected to the collaborative efforts of Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish forces with their spillover effects into Iran. On October 4, 1992, Iraqi Kurdish forces launched a major operation against the PKK guerrillas, ostensibly to push them back into Turkey and terminate their operations against the Turkish state from Iraqi Kurdistan. A few days later, Turkey launched a full-scale military operation in tandem with the Iraqi Kurds against the PKK. This operation, which had the full support of Massoud Barzani's KDP and Jalal Talabani's PUK, was the most important manifestation of a new alliance between Turkey and the government of the Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey has continued its large-scale military operation into Iraqi Kurdistan to the present time in pursuit of its goal of eradicating PKK operations from Iraq into Turkish Kurdistan.¹³ Even after the capture and conviction of the PKK's leader, Abullah Ocalan, and the PKK's announcement of

abandonment of its armed struggle against Turkey, Ankara has continued its military incursions into northern Iraq with the full support of the Kurdish Autonomous Administration.

Despite Iranian criticism of Turkey's military operations in northern Iraq, Turkey has defended its policy and has warned the Islamic Republic not to harbor anti-Turkish Kurdish guerrillas on its soil. Turkey also has not hesitated to attack Iranian territory from time to time. Such attacks seem to have taken on new significance in the aftermath of Ocalan's conviction and the strengthening of the Turkish-Israeli military alliance. Sometimes these Turkish incursions are downplayed by Iran while at other times the Islamic Republic issues warnings to Turkey. For example, on July 18, 1999, the Turkish Air Force bombed an Iranian border outpost near Piranshahr killing at least five people and injuring tens of others. The Islamic Republic initially downplayed the significance of this event and portrayed this incident as a probable mistake. However, five days later when the Turkish Army infiltrated Qatour, a border town in the province of Western Azerbaijan, Iranian forces challenged the Turks and forced them across the border. These incidents were followed by a weeklong war of words, finally culminating in a high-level meeting between the two countries and the announcement of a border security agreement between the two countries.¹⁴

Secular-Islamic Tensions

Turkey's avowed secularism and Iran's Islamism have been the cause of numerous conflicts and tension between the two countries in recent years. The Turkish press, and to a lesser extent, the Turkish government have on numerous occasions accused Iran of undermining Turkish interests by supporting antisecularist Islamic forces in Turkey. The murder on January 24, 1993 of a leading secularist Turkish journalist, Ugur Mumcu, demonstrates the potential for conflict between Turkey and Iran on ideological grounds. Although the Islamic Republic's authorities have steadfastly denied any involvement in Mumcu's murder, or the assassination of other secularists in Turkey in recent years, anti-Iranian sentiments have grown stronger among the Turkish ruling elites, especially in the upper echelon of the Turkish military. The Islamic Republic routinely contends that certain Turkish newspapers and figures in collaboration with the United States and Israel are intent on spreading false rumors to poison Turkish-Iranian relations.¹⁵

The Turkish parliamentary elections of 1999 added another twist to the secular-Islamist dimension of Turkish-Iranian relations. When Merve Kavakci, a U.S.-educated candidate, won a seat to the Turkish Parliament as a member of the Islamist Virtue (Fazilat) Party, she refused to remove her head scarf when she entered the Parliament. This act was interpreted by the Turkish elite as a direct challenge to the country's secularist constitution. The Iranian press, like the press in several other Muslim countries, ran critical stories against Turkey and in support of Kavakci. The Turkish government viewed this as yet another attempt by the Islamic Republic to undermine Turkey's secularist institutions. By the same token, the Turkish government annoyed the Islamic Republic when Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit publicly supported anti-government protests that erupted in Tehran and other Iranian cities in the summer of 1999. Ecevit told reporters that the demonstrations were a natural reaction by the Iranian public against an oppressive regime.¹⁶ Although these and similar episodes have so far been

contained and the leaders of both countries have successfully managed to defuse tensions that are generated, ideological incompatibility between the ruling establishments in Iran and

Turkey can engender lingering suspicions that can hamper normal relationships between these two neighboring countries.

Central Asian Dimension of Iranian-Turkish Conundrum

Historically, both Iran and Turkey wielded great influence in Central Asia at various times. Therefore, it is not surprising that these two countries emerged as principal regional actors in Central Asia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The demise of the Soviet Union did not shrink the border areas. In fact, the long Soviet-Iran border became more volatile, less secure and highly unpredictable. The much ballyhooed Iranian-Turkish competition for supremacy in Central Asia did not materialize to the extent that it would lead to another "Great Game" in the region. Despite the "alphabet wars" and "TV and radio wars," it is the United States and Russia that have strengthened their political and economic hold in the region. Even on the popular level, the jazzed-up Turkish television shows have lost their initial luster as the people of Central Asia have gone back to their old cultural comfort zones. In this respect, Iran seems to have played a more calculated and realistic role than has Turkey, which had high and lofty goals of dominating much of the region because of the Turkic identities of most of the region's people. In fact, it can be argued that the geopolitics of the region has forced Tehran and Ankara into economic cooperation within the regional context. For example both Iran and Turkey, as charter members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), coordinate their economic activities on a number of issues with the Central Asian members of this organization. At the same time, competition over Central Asian oil and gas pipeline routes have invariably pitted Turkey and Iran against each other as both become factors in this emerging market and as the United States seeks to bolster Turkish interests at Iran's expense.

The case of Azerbaijan is perhaps the most troublesome dimension of Iranian-Turkish relations in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In the post-independence period, especially during the brief presidency of Abolfazl Elcheby and his Popular Front, Azerbaijan adopted an unusually chauvinistic and Turkic-centered approach to the country's relations with its neighbors. Elcheby continuously challenged Iran on several occasions and called for the separation of Iranian Azerbaijan from the mainland. Some of the most extreme Turkish nationalists were invited to Baku to extol the virtues of pan-Turkism. Elcheby's successor, Heidar Aliyev, has for the most part sought to curry favor with all parties involved, although in the past two years he has taken a pro-Western and Turkish-centered stance in foreign policy matters. If developments in Azerbaijan lead to a stronger Turkish influence in that country, especially if coupled with Turkish-Israeli hegemony in the northern tier region, the Islamic Republic's relations with Turkey will invariably suffer. So far, the political and economic realities of Central Asia and the Caucasus have had a sobering effect on both Iran and Turkey, and the two countries have for the most part eschewed embarking upon adventurous schemes that would unnecessarily complicate their relations in the region.

Conclusion

This article seeks to analyze some of the most important foreign policy factors affecting Iranian-Turkish relations since the advent of the Islamic Republic in Iran. Although there are areas of mutual interests between Iran and Turkey, there still remains several points of divergence between the two countries. As an avowedly secular state, Turkey will always harbor inherent suspicion in its dealings with the Islamic Republic. The Turkish elite is profoundly suspicious of the role of Islam in public life while the Iranian leadership views Islam as a *sine qua non* of its existence. Furthermore, Turkey remains decidedly in the Western camp, and so long as the United States continues its policy of containment against the Islamic Republic, Iranian-Turkish relations will remain hostage to the vagaries of U.S. policies towards Iran. The example of the Turkish-Iranian gas deal is a good case in point. After years of negotiating with each other, Turkey and Iran signed a natural gas deal in August 1996. This \$20 billion mega deal was doomed to failure from the beginning. Although the deal had been negotiated by Turkey's pro-American conservative parties and had been initialed in 1995 by then Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, it was viewed by many in the United States as an ominous move by Turkey's then Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan and as a challenge to the U.S. sanctions laws against Iran. Under constant threat from the Clinton administration, the Turkish government failed to follow through with this agreement. Erbakan's forced resignation and the coming to power of right-wing pro-American Mesut Yilmaz and his anti-Islamist successor, Bulent Ecevit, finally finished any realistic hope of finalizing the deal.

Last, but not least, security issues remain an obstacle to effective Iranian-Turkish cooperation. Although the two countries have a common interest in stabilizing their border areas and have cooperated in containing Kurdish revolts, Turkey's increasing military cooperation with Israel will continue to strain relations between the Islamic Republic and Turkey. Since 1993, Turkey and Israel have signed numerous military agreements with each other. These agreements and the subsequent close cooperation between the Turkish and Israeli military are viewed by the Islamic Republic as another attempt by the United States and Israel to encircle Iran and threaten its national security and are viewed as hostile actions taken by the Turkish establishment against a neighboring country. Given Israel's crusade against the Islamic Republic, the Turkish-Israeli alliance could become one of the most important factors in Iranian-Turkish relations for years to come. Turkey and Iran are neither natural partners nor adversaries. They have some overlapping interests and some contradictory goals. The parameters of Iranian-Turkish relations are determined by the interplay of these competing goals.

Notes

1. For details, see Nader Entessar, **Kurdish Ethnonationalism**, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992, pp. 125-127.
2. For example, see, **Tercuman**, November 5, 1986.
3. **Milliyet**, November 17, 1986.
4. **Ettela'at**, January 12, 1987.
5. **Amnesty Action**, September-October 1988, p. 1.

6. Philip Robins, "Turkish Policy and the Gulf Crisis: Adventurist or Dynamic?" in Clement H. Dodd (ed.), **Turkish Foreign Policy: New Prospects**, Cambridgeshire: Eothen Press, 1992, p. 72.
7. **Manchester Guardian Weekly**, April 21, 1991.
8. **Kayhan Havai**, February 17, 1993.
9. **Iran Daily**, August 12, 1999.
10. For further discussion, see Nader Entessar, "Kurdish Conflict in a Regional Perspective," in M.E. Ahrari (ed.), **Change and Continuity in the Middle East: Conflict Resolution and Prospects for Peace**, London: Macmillan Press, 1996, pp. 47-73.
11. Graham E. Fuller, "Turkey's New Eastern Orientation," in Graham E. Fuller, Ian O. Lesser, with Paul B. Henze and J.F. Brown, **Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China**, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, p. 60.
12. For example, see **Kayhan Havai**, August 25, 1993.
13. For a critical report on the collaboration of the Iraqi Kurdish forces with the Turkish military, see Vera Beaudin Saeedpour, "A Conflict of Interests," **Kurdish Life**, no. 4, Fall 1992, pp. 1-5.
14. **Turkey Update**, August 10, 1999, and **Kayhan Havai**, July 26, 1999.
15. For example, see **Tehran Times**, July 22, 1999.
16. **Milliyet**, July 12, 1999.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16